

The Unity of the Brethren

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An address delivered before the Joint Meeting of the Conemaugh Valley Church of the Brethren and Brethren Ministers and unanimously approved by them, being requested for publication.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant for Brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1). There is a striking parallel between the history of the building of the Tower of Babel and that of the Church. We do not say that the one was a prophetic forecast of the other, but that there are striking points of comparison. When the Tower was built, there was marvelous unity among the people. "The whole earth was of one language and of one speech." In the first period of the history of the Church, there was marvelous unity. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Now, there crept into the hearts of the builders of Babel, a selfish ambition. They said, "Let US build a tower. Let US make for OURSELVES a name, etc." Even so, there crept into the Apostolic Church a worldly ambition. There came the desire to be popular instead of persecuted. The Church flirted with the world. In the building of the Tower of Babel, brick, slime, and mortar were used. They thought they could reach heaven by earthly substance. Even so, the Church yielded to the temptation to advance by political influence instead of spiritual power. She surrendered her pilgrim character under Constantine. In the construction of Babel, there was a man made unity. Under the Roman Papacy, a man made unity prevailed. Now, the building of Babel, resulted in confusion of tongues, races, nationalities, etc. Even thus from the Roman Papacy has come since the days of the Reformation the multitudinous forms of Protestantism.

There is a mystical union among God's children. All regenerated believers are a part of Christ's body and bride. All children of God are brethren in Christ. All who have received the spirit of adoption address the same God as "Father." Of such the Master spoke when he said, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." It is both narrow and unscriptural to say, "We four and no more" are saved.

Now, the Holy Spirit is able to produce actual unity among God's children. He did produce such in the Early Church. Paul declares in Ephesians 2: 14-15, "For he is our peace, who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh, the enmity." Naturally, there existed the most bitter enmity between Jew and Gentile, but the Spirit reconciled them in Christ. The Jerusalem Council gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. He is able to produce unity whenever we are willing to yield to him.

In Ephesians 4:3-6, we have the outline of Unity with its fundamentals. Prefacing these with these words, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Paul declares there are seven doctrinal fundamentals of unity. They are, "One body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one Father." The Holy Spirit is a unit, he is not divided. His power is unifying, never divisive. Whenever our hearts and wills are yielded unto him, he will harmonize and unify.

The only way that unity will ever come among the people of God is according to this Spirit-unifying program. History proves that any attempt to federate or unify otherwise is doomed to failure. Mechanical or man-invented schemes, however ingenious they are, cannot unify the people of God. The Holy Spirit can, but he alone.

Now, we turn from the general study of Protestantism and confine our study to the "Brethren." We deliberately turn our back on the past. With Paul, "we forget those things which are behind." We have no desire to stir unpleasant memories. Our purpose is to "reach forth unto those things which are before." Yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we present certain suggestive plans whereby we believe the Church of the Brethren and the Brethren church can and ought to become one denomination. We seek to make these practical and not visionary.

Biblical

Our union must be Biblical. The standard of the Brethren family from its origin until this very hour has been loyalty to the Bible. Other churches may federate on some other basis than strictly Biblical, but not the Brethren churches. We accept the Scriptures as the supreme authority in all things. Officially, both churches believe in the Scriptures as the inspired and infallible revelation of God. In this respect, we are already one in sentiment.

Doctrinal

Our union must be doctrinal. Biblical ordinances have been made distinctive in all our history. In the observance of these as Baptism, Feet-washing, Lord's Supper, Communion of Bread and Wine, Anointing the Sick, etc., we are and always have been in harmony. But, our doctrinal union must include all the doctrines of Christianity. No man or church ought ever to be asked to surrender or compromise belief in any part of the Bible for any reason. Accepting the Scriptures as inspired, no union could be consistent which did not include every doctrine taught in the Word. It ought to be comparatively easy for our churches to unite on this basis for the standards and teachings and

AS THE SCRIPTURE SAITH

Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25, 26).

They then that received his word were baptized; . . . And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:41, 42).

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you (Matt. 28:20).

If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them (John 13:17).

Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished (Matt. 5:18).

God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son (Heb. 1:1, 2).

I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

If a man love me he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and will make our abode with him (John 14:23).

official utterances of our churches are in harmony with it. Any preacher or layman denying any doctrine of the Bible is out of harmony with the church anyhow. Doubtless, both of us have apostate preachers and teachers who ought to be eliminated. We do not anticipate serious difficulty in doctrine whenever a union shall be attempted.

Church Polity

In the union of our churches, the chief difficulty may be in matters of church polity. There are points of difference in church government between us. But, these need present no insurmountable barrier to union. In anticipation of such a union, a joint commission could prepare a form of church polity patterned after that of the Apostolic Church. Surely the Bible presents, at least in principle, a form of polity.

Practical Suggestions

We present certain practical suggestions. These are largely local in application. **First**,—We recommend the forming of a Joint Ministerium of the ministers of our churches of Johnstown and vicinity which shall meet quarterly. This district represents, within a radius of 20 miles, 25 churches with an approximate membership of 7,000. It presents a most excellent opportunity for a better understanding between the two churches. This must begin with the ministers. **Second**,—We should encourage the mutual exchange of letters between our churches. Not the compelling of members to transfer their membership in moving from one locality to another, but the encouraging of this practice which already is in existence. Especially, we ought to encourage the transfer of membership in districts in which there is only one of the two churches. This would save folks to Brethrenism, strengthen both churches, and cultivate a feeling of at least co-operation between us. **Third**,—We ought to arrive at some understanding that will prevent a Brethren church and a Church of the Brethren from both locating in a district that will support only one in a successful manner. There are many such in existence today. Both struggle along, paying a pastor just above a starvation salary, when, if there was only one church of our faith, it could be a prosperous one. We ought to come to a

mutual agreement that will avoid the increase of such instances, even if it will not be retroactive in the correction of those that already exist. **Fourth**,—We suggest that fellowship meetings of all our churches in this district be held, these to be arranged by the Joint Ministerium—just deeply devotional, fraternal meetings. These would cultivate a better understanding and develop clearer relationships between us.

Now, we recognize that these suggestions are chiefly local in their application. The ultimate union of the two denominations will necessitate joint action by our two National Conferences. These suggestions will prepare us locally for this joint action which we believe is coming.

Finally, Brethren, the Whole Gospel for which we stand has an irresistible appeal to the human heart. There is a definite place for the Whole Gospel church. As we enter deeper into the days of the Apostasy, the church that can consistently present the Whole Gospel appeal will receive thousands of members. Let us therefore, "earnestly contend for THE FAITH, once for all delivered unto the Saints."

Johnstown, Pennsylvania.
